

(AD)MIRATIVE STRATEGIES

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***Abstract:** This paper approaches (ad)mirativity aiming at bringing to the fore possible strategies meant to show that the information conveyed to the interlocutor is new and unexpected. The approach fits in the general framework provided by the study of evidentiality (Dickinson 2000; DeLancey 2001; Montaut 2004; Molochieva 2007), seen as a linguistic category pointing at the way the source of information is marked in discourse. Our main assumption is that in English there are such (ad)mirative strategies (ranging from lexical devices to suprasegmental elements) which can be pragmatically analysed as speech acts. This study is part of the research developed within the SMADEM – IDEI 1209/2007 Project financed by the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth.*

***Keywords:** (ad)mirativity, evidentiality, discourse, grammatical category, speech act.*

Introduction

The paper aims at systematically presenting the concept of mirativity in close connection to the linguistic phenomenon of evidentiality. The descriptive approach to mirativity starts from the definition of the phenomenon and continues with the exemplification of the grammatical elements whose purpose is to indicate new and unexpected information both in languages where mirativity is encompassed by inferential evidentiality and in languages where mirativity is seen as a grammatical category per se. The second part of the paper attempts to highlight a series of mirative indicators in English and to point out the degree to which they are pragmatically meaningful by analysing them in particular contexts.

1. Mirative/admirative – a conceptual approach

The concept of mirativity points to the grammatical category (specific to non-Indo-European languages, particularly Balkan and Middle East languages) which refers to “the linguistic marking of an utterance as conveying information which is new or unexpected to the speaker” (DeLancey 2001, p. 370). The miratives/admiratives include those linguistic

structures generally integrated within the sphere of evidentials and used in order to refer to “perceptions of unexpected events at the very moment of speaking” (Lazard 2001, p. 361). (Ad)mirative markers aim at indicating “the degree to which the state or event is in agreement with the speaker’s general knowledge system” (Dickinson 2000, p. 389).

In literature, there have been debates with regard to the place mirativity has compared to evidentiality. Two directions have been therefore identified when dealing with this issue: mirativity is regarded either as a subdomain of evidentiality (Lazard 2001, Dendale and Tasmowski 2001), either as an independent phenomenon, distinct from evidentiality (although a connection between the two cannot be completely denied) (cf. DeLancey 2001, Plungian 2001, Montaut 2004).

1.1. Mirativity – a subdomain of evidentiality

According to Lazard (2001), evidentials have three main uses: hearsay, inference and mirative or admirative. The common features of these three values would be that: 1) in pointing to new, unassimilated knowledge, they all suggest that “the speaker feels distanced from the situation he is describing” (Slobin and Aksu 1982, p. 198); 2) they refer to the knowledge source without specifying it (Lazard 2001, p. 362).

The mirative markers are meant to show that the information conveyed by the utterance is based on the speaker’s “immediate perception of events” (Lazard 2001, p. 361). The author takes his examples from the Persian spoken in Central Asia:

Pul-am *na-bud-ay*
Money-CLIT: 1SG NEG-be-EV: 3SG
“I have no money (as I see).”

When using a mirative marker, the speaker seems to be divided into two persons: one who is speaking and one who has perceived. Consequently, it is through visual perception that the speaker becomes aware of the information transmitted thereafter to his/her interlocutor.

Furthermore, mirativity is seen as a subdomain of evidentiality, namely at the periphery of the conceptual sphere of evidentiality (Dendale and Tasmowski 2001, p. 341). The authors place mirativity between evidentiality (the very source of knowledge) and modality (speaker’s attitude: surprise). (Dendale and Tasmowski 2001, p.343)

1.2. Mirativity – a phenomenon distinct from evidentiality

In his analysis on Hare (an Athapaskan language spoken in the north-west of America), DeLancey (2001) pleads in favour of considering mirativity as an independent category from the evidential paradigm. In order to back his assumption, he discovers the particle *lō* which is likely to be used in all the situations when we are dealing with the “sudden direct perception of an unexpected fact” (2001, p. 376), especially if it is accompanied by the imperfective aspect. Moreover, the author argues that this value is in no way related to the knowledge obtained through inference and hearsay. To put it differently, mirativity marks “whether the information represents knowledge which is new to the speaker, or knowledge which is already integrated into the speaker’s picture of the world” (DeLancey 2001, p. 379).

Mary ewé ghálayeda lō
Work/3s subj/IMPF
Mary is working on hides.

This statement will be uttered by a speaker who, without having any suspicion of the situation, has just arrived at Mary’s and has found her working on hides. (DeLancey 2001, p. 376)

With Plungian (2001, p. 355), the (ad)mirative value is not evidential from a logical point of view. However, it is certainly modal, since it is based on a particular type of judgement, namely a judgement involving the speaker’s expectations. As a consequence, the admirative is not related to evidentiality since it does not refer to the way in which the speaker has had access to the knowledge, but to the way in which the speaker is ready to perceive the knowledge as expectative judgement and not as an epistemic one. The author also suggests that the admirative should be perhaps better studied within the broader context of expectation and counter-expectation markers.

At the beginning of her paper Montaut (2004, p. 111) makes reference to the three-fold classification according to which evidential values are used for: 1) reporting indirectly known facts (through hearsay, rumour or a third instance); 2) inferring facts based on noticeable clues; 3) expressing surprise. However, after having analysed the mirative values in Hindi, the author concludes that mirativity should be treated as a central category rather than derived in the evidential constellation, meant to express new non-assimilated

information, something the mind has not been prepared to face, as a specific category close to evidentiality. (2004, p. 118)

On the other hand, in Hindi, it may be noticed a clear distinction between rational inference [...] and mirative values associated to the aorist, a tense of the narrative past and of processes not related to the moment of utterance (Montaut 2004, p. 114). Consequently, the aorist (simple form identical to the accomplished participle) expresses surprise, while the perfect (accomplished participle + present of the auxiliary *be*) can express only an unmarked statement:

kitna baRâ ho gayâ! (**ho gayâ hai*)
combien grand être aller [devenir]-aor / (*est devenu-pft)
'qu'est-ce qu'il a grandi' / 'mais c'est qu'il a grandi!' (Montaut 2004, p. 114)

Mirativity should be also analysed in terms of the speaker's expectations. "In a mirative system, events and states that cannot be easily assimilated are coded differently than those that easily fall in with the speaker's expectations." (Dickinson 2000, p. 379) It may be therefore assumed that, if the situation considered does not match the speaker's expectations, the statement produced will receive a special marking of the mirative type.

2. On mirative markers and indicators

Although mirativity, as a conceptual category, is universal (since all languages have their own ways of indicating that an event overcomes the speaker's expectations), a mirative morpheme has only been identified in non-Indo-European languages such as: Hare, Chechen, Tsafiki, Turkish, Japanese, Korean, various Tibeto-Birman languages. However, in these languages, the mirative morpheme functions differently, namely it may either overarch an inferential value or occur independently from any evidential marker.

In Turkish, for instance, the verbal suffix *miş* functions simultaneously as an evidential marker of inferential or hearsay types and as a mirative marker:

Kemal gel-miş
Kemal come-*miş*
Kemal came. (Slobin and Aksu 1982, p. 187)

The authors argue that the aforementioned example may have three interpretations: a) inferential value: the speaker is able to see a clue indicating that Kemal has come, but he cannot actually see him; b) hearsay value: the speaker has been told that Kemal came home, but he doesn't see him; c) mirative value: the speaker can hear someone getting closer to his house, he opens the door and sees Kemal, a completely unexpected visitor.

On the other hand, in Chechen (a language spoken in the north-east of the Caucasian region), mirativity is a grammatical category distinct from evidentiality. The mirative value may be rendered by the suffix – *q* added to the verb root or to the auxiliary, if we are dealing with a composed tense. (Molochieva 2007):

Zara j-iena-*q*.

Zara J-come.PRF-MIR

"Zara has come!" (I didn't expect her to come). (Molochieva 2007)

We have pointed out so far that mirativity is directly expressed within the morphosyntactic system of several non-Indo-European languages. However, the existence in Indo-European languages of devices (ranging from lexical unities to suprasegmental elements) aiming at expressing that the information is new and unexpected and that it cannot be easily integrated within the speaker's expectations would argue in favour of a larger approach to mirativity.

Therefore, we come with the assumption that mirativity should be seen as a twofold concept:

- a) *restricted mirativity*: characterizing languages which have in their morphosyntactic system a particle/suffix called mirative marker (cf. supra);
- b) *enlarged mirativity*: specific to Indo-European languages and rendered by mirative indicators (for instance, lexemes with mirative value).

We distinguish between mirative markers and mirative indicators in the following way: the markers are morphemes associated with the verb in order to indicate the speaker's surprise when faced with an event perceived through an immediate visual experience (these morphemes are the only means to do it); the indicators form a larger category overarching lexemes, suprasegmental elements meant to show that the information conveyed is new and unexpected.

The analysis of mirativity performed on English by DeLancey (2001, pp. 377-378) would fit into the framework of the enlarged mirativity. The

author considers mirativity as a covert semantic category which becomes manifest through the mirative intonation seen as “an exaggerated version of the declarative intonation, with the tonic rise considerably higher” (DeLancey 2001, pp. 377-378). Consequently, the intonation should be considered as a mirative indicator, namely a suprasegmental element. For instance, when the speaker has to express his/her opinion concerning the performance at the piano of one of his/her friend’s child, s/he will make a compliment such as “She plays really well!” using the mirative intonation and not the declarative contour.

3. Mirative strategies in English

Furthermore, we will attempt to identify different classes of mirative indicators according to morphosyntactic and lexical criteria. We will also place special emphasis on their pragmatic function.

In English, we can point out the following classes of mirative indicators, without pretending to give a comprehensive classification:

I) imperative and interrogative sentences centred on verbs of visual and auditory perception - *look* and *hear*: *look at! have you heard (that)*:

(1) *Have You Heard? There Will Be An Organic Food Garden At The White House!*

Michelle Obama is tearing up part of the South Lawn and planting an organic food garden for her family. How cool is that? Michelle Obama has never grown a vegetable garden. The White House hasn’t had a garden on the South Lawn since Eleanor Roosevelt planted a Victory Garden during World War II. (<http://1greengeneration.elementsintime.com/?p=982>)¹

The sentence *have you heard* can be assigned the following values: 1) evidential value – the structure functions as a reportative type of evidential without clearly pointing out whether the source of information is a known third instance or whether it is derived from hearsay; 2) mirative value – the structure is meant to bring to the fore the unexpectedness of the information conveyed by the utterance; 3) pragmatic value – *Have you heard?* is used with a view to drawing the audience’s attention to the information transmitted.

¹ All the excerpts from the electronic messages taken from Internet forums are given with their original writing.

(2) *Look at Them Now!*

After Taking Off a Combined 1,300 Lbs. Without the Help of Surgery or Celebrity Trainers, Seven People Share Their Hard-Won and Emotional Weight-Loss Journeys.

(<http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20171125,00.html>)

The same three values aforementioned are to be discovered for the sentence *look at them now!*: 1) evidential value – the speaker reveals the fact that he has reached this information through direct experience (a visual one – “I saw with my own eyes that some people lost a lot of weight”); 2) mirative value – the language user speaks out her surprise when facing this unexpected reality; 3) pragmatic value – the speaker invites the audience not only to look at those people, but also, if necessary, to follow their example; we may say that we are dealing with an indirect speech act of advising someone to take action.

II) quasi-fixed exclamatory and interrogative sentences centred on non-perception verbs: *there he goes!*, *how cool is that?!*

(3) *There he goes again.*

The worst of the winter seems to have passed, and so the Volkswagen Campers have started parking outside my house again. This is the fifth one to lurk beneath my window.

(<http://cookylamoo.com/boringlikeadrill/2009/02/there-he-goes-again.html>)

The mirative function of this indicator is doubled by the expressive value since *there he goes again* reveals the speaker’s surprise as well as his indignation that a lot of vans are parked outside his window. This expressive value of indignation is reinforced by the adverb *again* which points to the reiteration of the described situation that got to both surprise and annoy the speaker.

(4) *How cool is that!*

This page is dedicated to people and organizations who are making an effort to improve the way we eat. From small local changes to big nationwide crusades, these guys get the thumbs up in our book!

(http://www.yum-o.org/how_cool_archive.php)

Although the main value of the above indicator seems to be to express the speaker's excitement as regards the creation of a particular web site, we cannot deny its mirative value since the excitement is triggered by both its novelty and its utility.

III) expressions occurring in interrogative sentences: *what the hell...?*

(5) *What the hell* did Jackie Chan just make me watch?

Dear god. Jackie Chan. On a Segway. Punching computer viruses. While wearing a helmet that says Kaspersky. I can only process this logically as him trying to gin up business for his Segway dealership. (<http://gizmodo.com/5324651/what-the-hell-did-jackie-chan-just-make-me-watch>)

The first utterance points to the speaker's surprise combined with puzzlement regarding a commercial he has just watched and not understood. The use of the adverb *just* reinforces the mirative value of the expression, since mirative indicators are triggered by an immediate visual experience that does not match the speaker's expectations.

IV) interjections – they allow the speaker to express his surprise as a spontaneous emotion: *oh, my gosh!, my God!, Holy shit!, Whoops!, Cool!*

(6) *Oh, My Gosh*, It's so Scary. I Could Barely Finish it.

(<http://horrorsnotdead.com/wpress/2009/oh-my-gosh-its-so-scary-i-could-barely-finish-it/>)

The interjection reveals the speaker's surprise concerning a situation that exceeds his expectations; he had basic knowledge about thrillers and he knew what he was dealing with, but the present situation was far from what he expected.

(7) *Whoops*.

While preparing for a software upgrade, I accidentally smashed the active database. Of course, I had made a backup before I started playing around, and was able to recover. However, if you made a comment or post in the few minutes before this post, and you don't see it, sorry, it's gone for good. (<http://www.feministcritics.org/blog/2009/07/05/whoops/>)

The interjection *whoops* expresses the speaker's moderate surprise when realising he unintentionally destroyed some internet database.

Since mirative indicators aim at pointing out that the information conveyed to the interlocutor is new and unexpected, they seem to have special pragmatic functions. Firstly, they may be considered as expressive speech acts allowing the speaker to render his spontaneous emotions. Secondly, we may argue that mirative indicators implicitly introduce a point of view which the speaker hasn't been committed to before (since the new situation has just been revealed to him) and which he attempts to impose on the audience.

(8) *My God*, what a country we live in.

Okay. I have been inside the American History Museum in D.C. more times than I can count. You walk in, you look up, and you see Old Glory behind the Foucault Pendulum, and the little sign, that told you the history of Old Glory.

Right?

No.

You walk in, you see a magnetometer, and a different flag. It's not Old Glory. It has black smudges on it. And the little sign tells you that it's the "Pentagon Flag"... (let's see if I can get this right)... the one that was hung at the pentagon on September 12, 2001.

They do still have Old Glory on display, by the way. Just in a different exhibit.

(<http://hyphen-dash.blogspot.com/2004/08/my-god-what-country-we-live-in.html>)

The functions of the mirative indicator *my God* are: 1) the language user speaks out his surprise concerning the attitude of museum authorities (they have decided to remove Old Glory to a different room and to replace it with the flag of the Pentagon); 2) the speaker's standpoint (his disagreement regarding this behaviour) is announced by the mirative indicator which does not play an essential part in dialectically resolving the dispute whether this move is right or not within the National History Museum; 3) the speaker tries to impose his standpoint on the audience (in this case the readers) and to make them commit to his disagreement.

Final remarks

In this paper, we have aimed at providing a conceptual approach to mirativity in close connection with the evidentiality theory. Mirativity

remains controversial as far as the place it holds in relation to evidentiality is concerned. The concept of mirativity has been enlarged and therefore allowed us the identification of possible mirative indicators in English.

Divided into four classes from morphosyntactical and lexical points of view (imperative and interrogative sentences centred on verbs of visual and auditory perception, quasi-fixed exclamatory sentences centred on non-perception verbs, expressions occurring in interrogative sentences, interjections), mirative indicators are used to express spontaneous emotions (expressive speech acts); moreover, if we deal with a critical discussion, mirative indicators introduce a standpoint that the speaker attempts to impose on the audience without succeeding, however, in solving, through their use in discourse, the difference of opinion.

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